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“OPERATIVE” AND “SPECULATIVE”

When treating the question of initiatic qualifications, allusion was made to a certain very widespread misunderstanding concerning the meaning of the word ‘operative’, and also, consequently, concerning that of ‘speculative’, which in a way is its opposite; and as we said then, it scems to us that there is reason to dwell more particularly on this subject in that there is a strict connection between this error and a general misunderstanding about what initiation really is. The question arises historically, so to speak, more particularly in connection with Masonry because it is here that the terms under discussion are most commonly used; but it is not difficult to understand that fundamentally it has a much more general scope and involves something that, according to different modalities, can apply to all initiatic forms, which is what constitutes all its importance from our point of view.

The starting-point of the error lies here. Because the form of Masonic initiation is linked to a craft, which is far from exceptional, as we have noted, and because its symbols and rites, in a word its particular methods in all their ‘specificity’, rest essentially on the” craft of building, people have come to confuse ‘operative’ with ‘corporative’, stopping thus at the most outward and superficial aspect of things, as is natural for anyone who has no idea or even suspicion of initiatic ‘realization’, The most widespread opinion can therefore be formulated as follows. ‘Operative’ Masons were exclusively craftsmen; little by little they ‘accepted’ as honorary members as it were people unacquainted with the art of building[1], but finally this second element came to predominate, so (hat ‘operative’ Masonry was transformed into

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a ‘speculative’ Masonry having only a fictitious or ‘ideal’ connection with the craft. This ‘speculative’ Masonry dates, as we know, from the beginning of the eighteenth century; but some, noting the presence of non-worker members in the former ‘operative’ Masonry, believe that they can conclude from this that these latter were already ‘speculative’ Masons. In each case it appears to be the almost unanimous opinion that the change that gave rise to ‘speculative’ Masonry marks a superiority with respect to that from which it derives, as if it represented a kind of ‘progress’ in the ‘intellectual’ sense and corresponded to a conception of a more elevated level; and they do not hesilate in this regard to oppose ‘speculations’ of ‘thought’ to the occupations of the craft, as if it were this that is in question, whereas it is instead a matter of things relating, not to profane activities, but to the initiatic domain.

There was formerly no other distinction in Masonry than that between ‘free’ Masons, men of the craft so called because of the exemptions granted by the sovereigns to their guilds (and no doubt also, and perhaps even especially, because the condition of free birth was one of the qualifications for admission to initiation)[2], and ‘accepted’ Masons, who were not professionals, and among whom ecclesiastics, who were initiated into special Lodges[3] in order to fulfill the function of ‘chaplains’ in ordinary Lodges, had a separate place. But both were equally, though in different capacities, members of one and the same organization of ‘operative’ Masonry; and how could it have been otherwise when no Lodge could function normally without a ‘chaplain’, and thus without at least one ‘accepted’ Mason among its members[4]? ‘Speculative’ Masonry, moreover, was formed precisely among these ‘accepted’ Masons and by their action;[5] and this can be explained simply enough by the fact that, not being directly attached to the craft and thus

2 One cannot, without diverting words entirely fiom their legitimate meaning, give any other interpretation to the expression free-born, which is applied to the candidate for initiation and surely has nothing to do with freedom from some sort of so-called ‘piejudice’!

3 In ancient ‘operative’ Masonry, these Loclges were called Lodges of Jakin and the ‘chaplain’ himself was called Brother Jakin.

4 Actually, we ought to say that it was obliged to have two, the other being a physician

5 These Masons moreover did not ieceive all the ‘operative’ trades, and this explains the existence at the beginning of ‘modern’ Masonry of ceirtain lacunae that had subsequently to be filled, which could not be done except thiough the intervention of the survivors from ‘ancient’ Masomty who were much more numerous in the eighteenth century than historians geneially believe.

lacking a solid basis for the initiatic work in question, they could more easily or more completely than the others lose sight of a part of what constitutes initiation—we could even say the most important part since it is this that properly concerns 'realization'[6]. It must further be added that because of their social situation and their outward relationships they were perhaps more open to certain influences of the profane world, political, philosophical, or otherwise, all working in the same direction and 'distracting' them, in the proper meaning of the word, from the initiatic work, even if these influences did not go so far as to lead them into unfortunate confusions between the two domains, as was later to happen only too often.

Having started with historical considerations for the convenience of our account, we here touch on the very root of the question: the passage from 'operative' to 'speculative', far from representing 'progress' (as the moderns, who do not understand its significance, would like to think), is in fact quite the opposite from the initiatic point of view. It does not necessarily imply a deviation properly speaking, but it implies at least a degeneration in the sense of a diminution; and as we have just said, this diminution consists in the neglect and forgetfulness of all that realization is—for it is this that's truly 'operative'—leaving nothing more than a purely theoretical view of initiation. It must not be forgotten thal 'speculation' and 'theory' are indeed synonyms, the word 'theory' of course not being taken here in its original meaning of 'contemplation' but solely in the sense it always has in current language, which the word 'speculation' no doubt expresses more clearly, since its very derivation implies the idea of something that is only a 'reflection', like an image seen in a mirror,[7] that is to say an indirect knowledge as opposed to the effective knowledge that is the immediate consequence of 'realization', or rather which is one with it. On the other hand, the word 'operative' must not be taken as an exact equivalent of 'practical', for this latter term always refers to 'action' (which conforms strictly to its etymology)

6 We pointed out this difference previously in connection with the present state of the Compagnonnage and Masonry, members of the former readily calling the Masons 'their speculative Brothers'; and while this expression implies the recognition of a common origin, it also sometimes contains a certain nuance of disdain, which is indeed not entirely unjustified, as one can understand from what we have explained here.

7 The word *speculum* in Latin means "mirror".

and thus could not be employed here without equivocation or impropriety;[8] in reality, it is a question of that 'accomplishmenv of the being that is initiatic 'realization', with all the different means that can be used in view of this end; and it is not without interest to note that a word of the same origin, oeuvre, is also used precisely in this sense in alchemical terminology.

It is thus easy to see what remains in the case of an initiation that has become merely 'speculative'. The initiatic transmission indeed still exists, since the traditional 'chain' has not been broken, but instead of the possibility of an effective initiation as long as some individual defect creates no obstacle, there remains no more than a virtual initiation that by the very nature of things is condemned to remain so, since the 'speculative' limitation properly signifies that this stage cannot be surpassed, as all that goes further belongs by very definition to the 'operative' order. This of course is not to say that the rites have no effect in such a case, for they always remain the vehicle of a spiritual influence even if those who accomplish them are no longer conscious of this; but this effect is so to speak 'deferred' with respect to its development 'in act' and is like a seed that lacks the conditions necessary to germinate, these conditions residing in the 'operative' work by which alone the initiation can be made effective.

In this connection we must again emphasize that such a degeneration of an initiatic organization changes nothing with regard to its essential nature, and that the continuity of the transmission itself suffices to render a restoration always possible should more favorable circumstances arise, this restoration then necessarily being seen asa return to the 'operative' state. But it is evident that the more an organization is thus diminished, the greater the possibility of at least a partial deviation, which naturally can occur in many different directions; and these deviations, while only of an accidental character, render any restoration increasingly difficult in fact, although, despite everything, it still remains possible in principle. However that may be, an initiatic

8 Here we have all the difference that exists between the respective meanings of the Greek words *praxis* and *poesis.*

organization possessing an authentic and legitimate filiation, whatever may be the more or less degenerate state in which it presently finds itself, could assuredly never be confused with any pseudo-initiatic organization whatsoever, which is nothing at all, or with the counter-initiation, which indeed is something, though something absolutely negative running directly counter to the purpose of all true initiation[9].

On the other hand, the inferiority of the 'speculative' point of view as we have just described it illustrates yet again, almost to excess, that 'thought' cultivated for itself can never be the purpose of an initiatic organization as such, for an initiatic organization is not a place to 'philosophize' or to participate in 'academic' discussions, any more than to engage in any other kind of profane occupation.[10]

When philosophical 'speculation' is introduced into an initiatic organization, there is already a true deviation; whereas if 'speculation' about the initiatic domain be limited to itself rather than being a mere preparation for the 'operative' work, as it normally should be, there exists only the diminution of which we spoke earlier, Here we have another important distinction, though we think it sufficiently cleat that further emphasis should not be necessary; it can be said in summary that a deviation exists, more or less serious as the case may be, whenever there is a confusion between the initiatic and the profane points of view. This must not be forgotten whenever one wishes to evaluate the degree of degeneration to which an initiatic organization may have succumbed; but aside from any deviation, the terms 'operative' and 'speculative' can always be applied in a very exact way lo any initiatic form whatsoever by referring them respectively to effective initiation and to virtual initiation.

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9 We have on many occasions pointed out that such precisions are not at all superfluous; thus we must formally protest against any interpretation that tends, either by an intentional or an unintentional confusion, to apply to any initiatic organization what, in our writings, really relates either to pseudo-initiation or to the counter-initiation.

10 We have never understood just what is meant by the expression 'societies for thought', contrived by certain people to designate a category of groups that seems rather ill-defined; but what is certain is that even if something exists to which this label might apply, it could never have the least connection with any initiatic organization whatsoever.

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THE ENIGMA OF MARTINES DE PASQUALLY

Continued

When we examine Martines' initiatic activity, we must never lose sight of what we have just pointed out above, that is, its double connection with Masonry and with another much more mysterious organization, the first being indispensable to the role assigned him by the second. There is furthermore something enigmatic even in his Masonic affiliation, nothing of which can be clarified (something not in the least exceptional at the time, when there was an astounding variety of rites and 'regimes'), but which in any case is before 1754, since from that time on he appears not only as a Mason, as we have just said, but also as already provided with 'Scottish' high grades[1], This is what allowed him to undertake the constitution of his "Temples'—with varying degrees of success depending on the case—'withim of the Lodges of various towns of the South of France until 1761, when he finally established himself at Bordeaux. We need not retrace all these documented vicissitudes, recalling only that at the time the Order of the Elect Cohens was still far from its final form; and in fact neither the list of grades, nor with greater reason the rituals, would ever be completely fixed thereafter.

From our point of view the other side of the question is the more important, and in this respect it is essential to note that Martines himself never had claimed to pose as supreme head of an initiatic hierarchy. His title of 'Grand Sovereign' does not contradict this, for the word 'Sovereign' also figures in the titles of various Masonic grades and functions without in any way implying that those who bear them are exempt from any subordination; among the Elect Cohens themselves

1 On this subject we must however express some doubt as to the Masonic character attributed to the 'Knight of the Rose Croissante' by way of 'Squire': it is quite correct that this was the name of a Scottish grade, which has moreover survived up to our time in the Rectified Rite; but in Martines' case its mention in the official secular documents would seem rather to indicate that it was no more than a nobilary title. But it is of course true that the one does not exclude the other.

the ‘Réaux-Croix’ were also qualified as ‘Sovereign’, and Martines was ‘Grand Sovereign’ or ‘Sovereign of the Sovereigns’ because his jurisdiction extended over all of them. The clearest proof of this is found in the following passage of a etter from Martines to Willermoz dated October 2, 1768:

> *The opening of the circumferences that I performed last September 12th was to open [sic] the operation of the prescribed equinoxes so that I should not be remiss in my spiritual and temporal obligations, The circumferences are open until the solstices and are kept up by me so that I may be ready to work and pray for the health and peace of soul and mind of the principal chief, unknown to both you and your Réaux-Croix brothers, and regarding whom I must remain silent until he makes himself known. I fear no untoward event, for myself in particular or for any of our brothers generally, but for the Order itself in that it would lose a great deal if it lost such a leader. I can only speak allegorically to you on this subject.*[2]

Thus, according to his own admission Martines was in no way the ‘principal chief’ of the Order of the Elect Cohens; but since in a way we see him constitute himself as such before our eyes, it was necessary that this leader be the one (or one of those) from the organization to inspire this new formation; and would not the fear Martines expressed be that the disappearance of this person might lead to the premature interruption of certain communications? Furthermore, it is quite clear that what he says can in any case apply only to a living man and not to some phantasmagorical entity; the occultists have spread so many fantastic ideas of this kind that such a remark is not entirely superfluous.

It could perhaps still be said that here it is only a question of the hidden leader of some Masonic organization;[3] but this hypothesis is ruled out

2 Cited by P. Vulliaud, Les Rose-Croix lyonnais au XVIII siecle, p72. — We do not know why in this connection Vulliaud speaks of ‘Unknown Superiors’, even saying that Martines speaks of them in this letter, whereas he has not made the least allusion to any such designation. On the other hand, when Martines uses the word ‘allegorically’, it is very likely he means ‘enigmatically’, for there is no trace of ‘allegory’ in all this.

3 If such was the case, some would perhaps identify this person with the pretender Charles-Edward Stuart, to whom, rightly or wrongly, a similar role has been attributed. If we allude to this here, it is because

by another document produced by van Rijnberk, a resumé by the baron of Turkheim of a letter Willermoz addressed to him on March 25, 1822, of which the beginning reads:

> *As to Pasqually, he has always said that in his position as Sovereign 'Réaux' for his region, which included the whole of Europe, he could make and support successively twelve 'Réaux', who would be dependent on him and whom he would name his Equals.*[4]

It follows that Martines held these 'powers, which moreover were carefully defined, from an organization that extended outside Europe (which was not the case of Masonry at this time),[5] and of which the principal seat must also have been outside, for if the latter were in Europe itself, the 'delegation' Martines received for this region would not have been able to carry any true 'sovereignty. On the other hand, if what we said earlier of the Sephardic origin of Martines' initiation is correct, this place could very well be in North Africa, which is by far the most likely supposition. But in this case it is quite clear that it would not be a question of a Masonic organization and that it is not here that we should seek the 'power' by which Martines was instituted 'Sovereign Réaux' for a region coinciding with Masonry's entire sphere of influence, which would in other respects justify his foundation of high grades of the Order of the Elect Cohens, in the special form of a 'regime'.[6]

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it could derive some plausibility from the fact that the 'Knight of the Rose Croissante' speaks of the 'marks of esteem and recognition that the claimant Stuart seemed to show to Martines' when the latter presented himself before the Lodges of Toulouse, that is in 1760, eight years before the letter just cited; but what follows will show that something quite different must be involved.

4 These are the former, also called 'Sovereigns', as we said above. We call attention to this number twelve, which continually recurs wherever the constitution of initiatic centers is concerned, whatever traditional form may be involved.

5 It is useless to speak here of America, which from the Masonic point of view represented at that time nothing more than a dependency of Europe.

6 The terms Willermoz employs seem to indicate that the region placed under Martines' authority did not include Europe alone; it would also have included America, as is shown by the importance it later assumed in San Domingo's history of his life and Order; and this again confirms that the sphere of activity attributed to him coincided with the group of countries where Masonry existed, and where it was even the sole surviving initiatic organization capable of furnishing a basis for the work with which it was charged.

The demise of this Order is scarcely less obscure than is its beginning. Martines' two successors did not long exercise the functions of 'Grand Sovereign', for the first, Caignet de Lestére, died in 1778, four years after Martines, and the second, Sébastien de Las Casas, retired two years later, in 1780. What remained thereafter as far as a regularly constituted organization is concerned? It seems that very little remained, and that if a few "Temples? did persist for a time after 1780, this hardly deferred the cessation of all activity. As for the designation of another 'Grand Sovereign' following the retirement of Sébastien de Las Casas, it is nowhere in question; there was however a letter from the Knight of Bacon, dated January 26, 1807, speaking of the 'absolute silence of the Elect Cohens, who always acted with the greatest discretion in executing the supreme orders of the Sovereign Master, G.". Z.". W.. J... But what can we make of such information, as bizarre as it is enigmatic, and perhaps even quite fanciful? In any case, in the letter of 1822 just cited, Willermoz states that, 'of all the Réaux he has known, none still live, just as it was impossible for him to name one after him'; and if there were no longer any 'Réaux-Croix' there will be no transmission to perpetuate the Order of the Elect Cohens.

Apart from 'direct survival', to use to van Rijnberk's expression, the latter envisages an 'indirect survival' consisting in what he calls the two 'Willermozist and Martinist metamorphoses'; but here we have an ambiguity that should be clarified. The Rectified Scottish Rite is not a metamorphosis of the Elect Cohens but a derivation from the Strict Observance, which is totally different; and if it is true that by means of the dominant role he played in the development of the rituals of its higher grades (in particular that of "Knight Beneficent of the Holy City'), Willermoz was able to introduce some of the ideas he had taken from Martines' organization, it is no less true that the great majority of the Elect Cohens strongly reproached him for the interest he had thus shown in another rite, which in their eyes was almost a betrayal, just as they reproached Saint-Martin for a change in attitude of another kind.

This case of Saint-Martin must engage us a while longer, if only because so much has been made of it in our time; the truth is that, if Saint-Martin

abandoned all the Masonic rites to which he had been linked, including that of the Elect Cohens, this was in order to adopt an exclusively mystical attitude, one therefore incompatible with the initiatic point of view, and certainly not to found a new Order himself. In fact, the name 'Martinism', commonly used only in the profane world, applies only to Saint-Martin's particular doctrines and the adherents thereof, whether or not these latter were directly related to him. What is more, Saint-Martin himself, not without some irony, qualified those who simply read his works as 'Martinist' It would seem however that several of his disciples did receive from him individually a certain 'deposit', which actually consisted of only 'two letters and some periods'; and this transmission is held to be the source of modern 'Martinism' But even if all this is true, how could such a communication, effected without any rite, represent an initiation? The two letters in question are 'S' and 'T, which, whatever interpretation one may give them (and there are many), seem to have exercised a real fascination on some people; but in the present case what can be their provenance? Surely this was not a reminiscence of the 'Unknown Superiors' [Supérieurs Inconnus] of the Strict Observance; besides, there is no need to look so far, for some Elect Cohens used these letters in their signature, and van Rijnberk offers a very plausible hypothesis when he suggests that they could have been the distinctive mark of the members of the 'Sovereign Tribunal' charged with the administration of the Order (to which Saint-Martin himself belonged, as did Willermoz); they would therefore have indicated not a grade, but simply a function. In these conditions, it could in spite of everything seem strange that Saint-Martin should have adopted these letters rather than 'R. C., for example, if they had not had in themselves their own symbolic significance, from which when all is said and done their various usages were merely derived, Be that as it may, there is a curious fact which shows that Saint-Martin really did attach a certain importance to them, which is that, in the Crocodile, he used these initials to form the name of an imaginary 'Society of Independents', which was not really a society or even an organization, but rather a kind of a mystical communion presided over by Madame Jof, that is to say Faith personified.[7] And another peculiar point is that toward the end of

7 For his part, Willermoz also makes use of the same initials to give the name 'Society of Initiates' to the

the story the Jew Eléazar is admitted into this ‘Society of Independents’, no doubt we should see this as an allusion, not to something concerning Martines personally, but much rather to Saint-Martin’s passage from the doctrine of the Elect Cohens to this mysticism into which he withdrew during the whole of the last part of his life; and, in communicating to his nearest disciples the letters ‘S. I? as a kind of sign of recognition, may he not have wanted to say that they could consider themselves members of what he had wanted to represent by the ‘Society of Independents’?

These final observations will make clear why we are far from sharing the overly ‘optimistic’ views of van Rijnberk, who, in wondering whether the Order of the Elect Cohens ‘completely and exclusively belongs to the past; is inclined to reply in the negative, while however recognizing the absence of all direct filiation, which is the sole is consideration in the initiatic domain. The Rectified Scottish Rite certainly still exists, contrary to what he seems to believe, but in no way originates in what we are discussing. As for modern ‘Martinism,, we can assure him that it has very little to do with Saint Martin, and absolutely nothing to do with Martines and the Elect Cohens.

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very real group he founded for the study of certain somnambulistic phenomena.